



FSIS SUPERVISORY SUMMARIES

A series of “on target” supervisory selection guidance

TOPIC #5: INTERVIEW POLICY: OFFICIAL TIME AND USE OF GOVERNMENT EQUIPMENT

In addition to requirements related to Behavioral Event Interviewing, there are other aspects of our Agency's interview policy, such as official time entitlements, use of government-provided equipment in the application process, etc., of which managers and employees alike should be aware. Here are some Q&As related to these other areas.

Q: I am an FSIS employee and have applied for another FSIS position. I am to be interviewed as part of the selection process. Am I entitled to official time for the interview?

A: No, there is no “entitlement” to official time, even though you are applying for an internal position. The exception is for employees who have official Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) status. (There is further information regarding interview procedures while in CTAP status in questions to follow.)

Going on a job interview is an absence from your regular workday. Even a telephone interview temporarily prevents you from performing your normally assigned duties. Because an interview is not part of your assigned duties, you must either take some form of leave, or request and be approved for official time for the interview. Supervisors may grant a reasonable amount of official time for you to interview because it's in the agency's best interest to fill its vacant positions.

Q: I don't understand. The FSIS employee interviewing me is on official time. Isn't this a double standard?

A: No. The FSIS employee interviewing you is performing part of an official duty by taking steps to fill a vacancy. Typically, the person interviewing you will be the first-line or higher level supervisor for the vacancy being filled (or another agency employee who has been asked to participate in, or to conduct the interview). In either case, the person conducting the interview is performing official agency business by taking steps to fill a vacant position.

Q: So, I have to take leave when interviewing for another FSIS position?

A: Not necessarily. You can request official time for your interview from your supervisor. This request must be made and approved prior to the interview. Your supervisor has the discretion to grant official time for this purpose, depending on workload, office coverage, the potential cumulative effect of numerous such requests, the length of time anticipated, etc.

In considering whether you want to request official time, keep in mind you will need to explain the reason for your request to your supervisor. If you prefer not to reveal the reasons for your requested absence, you can schedule the interview prior to or after your regular working hours, during your lunch period, or while you are in an approved leave status (other than sick leave, of course).

Q: The FSIS program I am interviewing with is located outside my duty station location. I have been informed by them that their program will reimburse me for travel expenses and pay me per diem. Since I am on official travel, I am on official time as well--correct?

A: No. In these circumstances, you are not on "official" travel or in an official duty status since you are not involved in performing assigned duties. The program has only agreed to pay your travel expenses—a practice often extended to both internal and external applicants.

If you are traveling to a location outside your duty station for an interview and you have requested and been granted official time by your supervisor, you should also be prepared to perform work (as appropriate during your normal work hours) while away from your regular work site. For example, you can review or write documents related to official business, or conduct business by phone or e-mail, or with other FSIS employees who work at the site where you are interviewing.

Q: Can the FSIS manager conducting my interview grant me official time?

A: No. Only your own supervisor can grant you official time. Other FSIS managers can only suggest that you request official time from your supervisor. You then need to decide whether you want to request official time from your supervisor and explain that you will be interviewing for another position, or if you prefer to request leave to cover your absence.

Q: Can my supervisor grant official time for me to interview with other Federal agencies or for private sector positions?

A: Yes, but only under limited circumstances. This entitlement only applies to surplus or displaced employees who have been officially notified that are covered by the provisions of the Career Assistance Transition Program (CTAP). CTAP provisions apply when an employee has been notified by the agency that he or she may be separated (through no fault of the employee) because of a reduction-in-force or when the employee does not accept a reassignment to a position outside of the commuting area.

An employee who is not covered by the CTAP provisions must take an appropriate form of leave (such as annual leave, compensatory time-off, credit hours, leave without pay) when interviewing for a position outside of FSIS.

Q: What is CTAP and how do I become CTAP eligible?

A: CTAP is a government-wide program designed to help Federal employees secure other employment. It provides, among other things, official time for job hunting and interviewing and the use of some government-owned facilities (e.g., copy machine, paper, word processing program, fax machine) to assist you in your efforts. To become CTAP eligible you must be a career or career-conditional employee whose position has been identified as surplus or displaced. In these circumstances, you will receive a written, official notification of your employment options (to include resignation), and asked to elect an option. For details regarding CTAP, see FSIS Directive 4300.3.

Q: What is the difference between job hunting and interviewing?

A: Job hunting is your actual search for employment opportunities, like reading the classified ads in the newspaper, meeting with an employment agency (so-called "headhunters"), writing or updating your resume, conducting online searches for jobs, etc. Interviewing is the actual meeting of an applicant and an interviewer where questions are asked and discussions held concerning a specific position.

Q: Do I have to be CTAP eligible to update and print my resume from my work PC or to go to USAJOBS to see what's out there in the job market?

A: Not necessarily. Agency policy remains as outlined in FSIS Notice 58-01 which stated that employees may use their work PCs to complete and print job applications for FSIS and other Federal employment opportunities provided the use is not on official time or has no negative

effect on official duties, does not interfere with Agency operations, and does not result in discernible increased costs to the Agency. While the notice did not address the use of fax machines to submit applications, OPM has encouraged Federal agencies to accept faxed job applications, so the use of a government-provided fax machine to transmit a Federal job application is also permitted within the above-described parameters. However, keep in mind employees may not send applications using Government postage-paid envelopes or postage stamps issued for official business. Also, while the use of a plant-provided fax machine is occasionally required and justified in very limited official business-related circumstances, the use of a plant-provided fax machine for any other reasons, to include submitting a Federal job application, is a conflict of interest and strictly prohibited. Lastly, you need to understand that there is no right to privacy when using any government-provided equipment for tasks not related to your job duties.